5 CHILD CARE

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"Pacifying the children is no less of a job than digesting the raw flesh of an animal."
(Proverb)

Feeding the Infant

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5.1. In Chapter 4 I have described the actions which immediately follow an infant's arrival in the world. There we saw how the newborn child sucks his mother's breast for the first time, and then swallows a small piece of bezoar. This is only one of several substances that he may be offered in the first few days of life. It has been reported that another buffalo product used to be given a day or two after birth, but its identity is uncertain; some identify it with bezoar, others with asafoetida, which is in fact a resinous vegetable substance. After a few days, when the child's stool is not yellow, some burnt rhizome of the sweet flag is also fed to the baby, mixed with mother's (Jagor 1876: 199). Somewhat later in life children were sometimes taken on pilgrimage to the temple at Ka:ramaḍai, near the eastern foot of the Nilgiris, where they were fed a particularly unsavoury medicinal foodstuff. Here during the annual festival for the goddess Ma:riamma mendicants were given consecrated pieces of banana mixed with crude sugar. These they chewed a little, then spat into the hands or mouths of devotees, who ate this or fed it to their children because it was believed to cure all diseases ("Miles" 1933: 267).

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5.2. Mother's milk is the best food for a baby, better than any animal's milk. The child should be weaned at one year, particularly as the mother may be pregnant again by then. Some mothers naturally have little milk; with others the flow of milk may stop if

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4: Hockings E-5 (1962-1977) 1980
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853 751 783 A woman affected by a "bad wind" of any kind can counteract it by going out beyond the territorial boundaries of her village and then returning, on the way finding the two plants *moḷḷe muttu giḍu* and cardamom. She should rub them together in her palms, adding a little water and rabbit dung. Then if she swallows this preventive mixture before nursing the child it will not be affected by the "bad wind."

853 751 755 5.5. There are two medicines that can be administered to a mother if her milk stops flowing because of some frightening experience. The first one applies if her baby is less than four or five months old. The therapist sitting with the mother has a whole lime in one hand and with it some sacred ash (*vibuṭi*) or occasionally wood ash. She moves the lime around clockwise (from her viewpoint) in front of the mother, while saying: "If there is any bad air, or if she has had a fright, may the milk now flow!" The sacred ash is then smeared on the mother's brow and she eats a little of it too. Next the lime is cut in half, and the mother drinks its juice. This procedure is followed every morning for three days. If the baby is older than four months another medicine is given instead. Half a glass of the juice of the cockspur flower is drunk by the mother before each morning meal, for three or five consecutive days.

862 5.6. Before weaning the child is already being fed by hand by some relative and this continues until at about four or five years he feeds himself from a separate plate or leaf. From the start of the third month of life, and certainly before the start of the fifth month, the baby is given solid food. In earlier times more than today this was a good quality of little millet; now good rice is more usual. It is mixed with water or cow's milk—but not buffalo's—and boiled in a small pot (*kuḍikke*) used only for this purpose. A pinch of salt is added and perhaps some butter or clarified butter. The baby is given this once daily during the first month of eating, and thereafter twice daily.

539 862 One proverb exhorts people to be generous in feeding enough to the children: "Neither should the rice become half, nor the sister's children become weak." Or sarcastically, "See that person dance with half-empty stomach!" (Metz 1864: 97). Another refers however to the greediness of some children: "If you give a child, which has scarcely spoiled flour to eat, a cake, it will ask sugar to put upon it" (Metz 1864: 96).